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ABSTRACT

This series of 12 articles for parents on how to help pre-schoolers and beginning readers at home was written for the National Reading Center by specialists in reading and early childhood education. The titles and authors are: "Getting Ready to Read" (E. Robert La Crosse), "Creating a Good Reading Climate at Home" (Mary Frances K. Johnson), "Reading Games to Play at Home" (Nancy Larrick), "Kindergarten--An Important Pre-Reading Step" (Lucile Lindberg), "Reading and Language Development in First Grade" (Celestia Davis), "Reading Readiness--What Parents Should Know About It" (Marjorie S. Johnson), "A Primer for Parents on Reading Methods" (Dorothy M. Dietrich), "Adults as Reading Models for Children" (Virginia H. Mathews), "Vision, Hearing, Coordination and Health in Reading" (Marie S. Crissey), "Reducing Pressures in Learning to Read" (Grayce A. Ransom), "Getting Help on Reading Outside of School" (Virginia H. Mathews), "What can Communities do to Improve Reading Programs" (D. Philip Baker). (WR)

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Parents and Beginning Readers

1. GETTING READY TO READ

By Dr. E. Robert La Crosse

Kindergarten! What an adventure for a 5- or 6-year-old. At last he is getting an opportunity to go to school like the older children. It is a time of anticipation, curiosity, a little anxiety, and usually a great deal of enthusiasm. Very often kindergarten is the first school experience a child has. If it is a good one it will probably affect his whole school experience favorably. Going to school for the first time is an important event and there is much a parent can do before kindergarten begins to make that first year at school a constructive one—one which will help develop a desire for learning and a lasting sense of curiosity.

What are some of these things? Here are several ideas and suggestions.

Realize first that your role as parent changes as a child moves from the home to an outside situation. No longer will you be immediately available to sense when he is tired or when his feelings are hurt or when he has had enough of a certain activity. A parent must now learn to be a supporter . . .someone who sets up home life so it will complement what is going on in school, who provides for needs that may not be met in school. For instance, if your child needs to be off by himself, away from people from time to time, you can provide for this when he comes home from school. School doesn't allow much private time. Home can. Some habits may need to be altered. If, as is the case in many crowded school situations, your child will attend an afternoon kindergarten, summer will be the time to help him develop a sleep or rest pattern that does not interfere with his school hours. Afternoon naps or rest periods can be changed to some time earlier in the day or an earlier bedtime can be adopted. In any case, adjusting to his new situation will be hard for him if he is used to dropping off to sleep at 2 p.m. every day and then finds that he can't do that when he gets to school.

During the time your child spends away from you he will be doing things about which you will naturally be curious. Consider planning a regular time when you and he can talk about things. All too often parents pop the question "What did you do at school today?" just as Junior bursts through the front door, glad to be home, filled with energy and with no desire to sit down and give a review of the day's doings. A better time may be at snack time or dinner time. Psychologists tell us that eating and "feeling good" tend to go together—a child settles down a bit and is willing to talk. He'll look forward to a definite chance to tell you what life at school is like, and you'll get a much better idea of his school life than the usual answer to "What happened at school today?" which is "Nothing!"

You don't need to tell him to "Mind the teacher!" If he goes along with things at home, he'll probably do the same thing at school. The main concern is that you not set the teacher up as some kind of a policeman. She has been trained to handle children and will probably be skilled at it. Don't stress the idea of discipline, but rather the idea that school is an interesting place where a lot of things happen. Try to create the image of school as a place to explore, be curious, find out about things.

Try to help your child begin to do things that he will have to do in school and that he may not have had to do at home. Sometimes he will have to follow directions carefully and quickly. If that is hard for him, help him practice a bit. Also in kindergarten he'll probably have to do a good deal of waiting—waiting for a piece of equipment, for other children to have their turn, for the rest of the class to finish up. You might help him to prepare for this at home: When he asks for something that he needs help with, ask him to wait a few minutes until you finish what you are doing. You can use this opportunity to point out that in school there will be one teacher and many children and often she will not be able to get to him the minute he wants her. He will have to learn to be patient and not expect everything to happen at once, just when he wants it to. You can also help him to deal with the fact that he will have to be quiet and listen from time to time. For

a lively 5-year-old boy this can be the most difficult thing of all. You can help him by reading stories to him and asking him to sit quietly beside you. Or you can play a game in which you make softer and softer sounds until he can no longer hear you. Use your ingenuity, but help him learn to sit quietly and listen for a period of time. Talk with him, too, about how it *feels* to sit quietly, to listen, to wait, and to follow directions. Recognize that these are hard things for a small boy or girl to do and support him in his attempts to do them.

You will also want to talk with him over a period of time about the fact that not all people feel the same way about things as do his mother and daddy. For instance, you may not be upset about an occasional four-letter word, or blowing bubbles in milk, or leaving blocks on the floor, or the fact that your child feels free to hit when he feels he has been wronged. On these or other matters the teacher may have a very different viewpoint. She may, on the other hand, tolerate some behavior that is not acceptable to you. One of the jobs your child has is to sort out "what to do with whom." You will be doing him a great service if you let him know that the teacher will do many things differently than you do at home and that this is the way people are.

Along these lines you will also want to let him know that there are many ways of saying the same thing. Maybe at home you are lavish with praise when your child has done something well. A busy teacher may only say "good" and give a little pat. For her this is high praise, but it may be puzzling to a child used to a real extravaganza of praise.

Another thing your child will probably have to do in kindergarten is to pick up after himself. Teachers don't expect everything to be perfectly in place, but with a big class they do rely on the children's cooperation in picking up to prevent total chaos by the end of the day. Picking up is one of the things you can help with at home, even if you haven't been too concerned with it up to now. Don't turn it into a major confrontation, but some gentle reminders and patient waiting until it is done, with encouragement, will help create a smooth transition into the kindergarten scene.

Your own attitude and adjustment to your child's going to school will have a grea deal to do with how he feels about school and adjusts to it. Children are very sensitive to their parents' moods and feelings, and they learn by modeling themselves after what they see in their parents. If you approach your child's going to school with anxiety—"Will he adjust?" "Will he have friends?" "Will the teacher be good?" "Will he get hurt on the playground?"—your child is sure to pick this up and start asking his version of the same questions. If, on the other hand, you have some confidence in his ability to cope, and if you see school as a new and exciting opportunity for your child to expand his horizons, grow and develop new ways of coping, he will pick up this sense of positive excitement too and will be all the better prepared for opening day.

Your child also needs you as a model for problem solving, particularly where school is concerned. Perhaps you will be sending your child to a school you have doubts about, or to a teacher the parent grapevine has said is strict with little children. Possibly your school is overcrowded and rundown. Perhaps all the services you feel a school should provide are not being provided. In any case, your behavior, the way you cope with your misgivings, will be watched carefully by your child and will influence his reactions to his new environment. Your reactions will also give him clues as to the "family approved" way of reacting to and handling the situation. If you complain bitterly, expect the worst, and do nothing, you'll very likely have a child who will cope with his own problems at school in just about the same way. If, on the other hand, you become actively involved in an issue, ask questions, talk to others, and in your own way contribute to positive change, your child is very likely to adopt the same coping strategy. You have much to do with setting the tone about school and the strategies to cope with it that your child will use. Obviously then, it is important that you try to show that even hard problems can be dealt with, even if it does take a long time to solve some of them.

Going to kindergarten is an excellent time for a parent to build new bridges between the young child just beginning school and his older brothers and sisters. This is a time when a "good" big brother feeling can be encouraged in big brother. This, in a sense, is the moment when a small child moves out of the realm of being the baby who stays at home while the other kids go to school. Now he is joining the world of the "big kids." Some older brothers and sisters may need help in seeing that it's not just the "baby going to baby kindergarten," but, rather, "now little brother is going to school too." This is an ideal time for mutual growth. Big brother knows some of the ropes; he can increase his own sense of competence by explaining those "ropes" to his younger siblings, even to the point of reminiscing

about his own kindergarten experience, both the high points and the low points. At any rate, the skillful parent can take advantage of this new relationship in the family which encourages sharing and helping. This can be difficult, it's true, because in describing kindergarten to a youngster, sometimes older children take delight in painting a picture of a place resembling a prison. Parents, however, can step in and bring things back from fantasy and into the reality that school will have both good and bad points and that it is very much up to the student what he gets out of it.

As a parent you must develop good communication with your youngster. You should not just want to hear the good or the bad, but both. A parent should also be willing to *hear it all* in the beginning, no matter how dull, particularly as your child begins his school years and makes his first efforts in reading. By spinning their tales, children learn to use language and begin to find out what is interesting to adults and what is not. A parent who offers an attentive ear will be able to encourage this important avenue of communication and foundation for reading. This does not mean just listening to words. You know your child better than anyone. You know the signals that indicate he is tired, even if he vigorously denies it; you know when something is troubling him, even if he says it is nothing. You should be able to "listen" for them and then provide the support at home so that you, your child and the school are in balance. By maintaining this balance, you will help to create a climate favorable for learning—one in which your child will develop good attitudes toward school, toward reading and the other skills he must master; and one in which you will be aware of his difficulties and successes, his strengths and weaknesses, so that you can provide the necessary help and support. If your child's first experiences at school are positive and the avenues of communication between you and your child are open, he will enjoy school and the reading and learning that are a part of it. A good start in school is a start on the road to success in reading.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

2. CREATING A GOOD READING CLIMATE AT HOME

By Mary Frances K. Johnson

In the job of teaching children to read, the home makes its most important contribution by helping the child develop favorable attitudes toward learning and reading. This is a long-term process that begins in infancy and continues all through childhood. It is not a job that is "finished" when your child enters first grade.

The home's invaluable contribution is to provide a favorable climate, in order to help the child develop the qualities he needs to bring to the process of learning in school. These qualities include eagerness to be independent, to "look after himself"; eagerness to explore the world around him; courage and confidence in attempting new tasks; and enjoyment of being with others and learning from them. The child also acquires in the home foundations in language and concept development which go hand-in-hand with experience and pave the way for reading. The family is the source of early learning that feeds reading: listening, speaking, conversation, awareness of what writing and reading are, knowledge about books, attitudes toward books and reading.

As the child enters school and progresses through the primary grades, the first and major job of the home is to build up his eagerness and confidence in approaching learning and to help him achieve satisfaction in reading for himself. The saying, of course, may be easier than the doing. For most children, learning to read is difficult and gradual. It's very important that the beginner, who is struggling to learn, continue to find it rewarding, important, and worth the effort.

A good starting point for the parent who wants to help is to become aware of the basic concepts and approaches in reading instruction. Talk with a reading teacher or ask your librarian for informative books and articles to help you learn something about what's involved in teaching reading.

Experts stress the importance of a relaxed, tension-free atmosphere for the learner. They also emphasize that there is no *one* way, no sure-fire method of teaching reading that succeeds equally well with all children. They remind us that individual differences among children really exist and they challenge the notion that "every child should learn to read at age 6." They discuss "readiness" for reading as a long-term period, rather than a precise point that should be reached by a certain age. You can gain a better understanding of just what will be expected of your child in school by talking with his teacher.

When your child enters first grade, you can reinforce and follow up in many ways what his teacher is doing. First of all, show your interest. This is the child's work; it is significant; give time to it. Of equal importance is encouraging your child. Offer help, but don't push. Gear your help to responding to his interests.

Listen to his early reading efforts with patience and enthusiasm. Remember that reading aloud and repetition are important to the beginner. By being a good listener you can extend his opportunity to try himself out, to practice, to know that he is reading.

If your child asks you to tell him a word, tell him. Read to him on request. Don't hesitate to help him in saying and writing the alphabet, if he shows that this is what he wants. Play games, not thinly disguised drills, but real games that help develop listening and oral language skills. Again, your librarian can lead you to some. Print labels and signs for him to read at home. Let him dictate stories from his own experience and write them down for him to read. Such reading will hold his attention.

Today, the parental "hands-off" approach, once advocated, is recognized as neither reasonable to the child nor psychologically sound. But providing the right *kind* of help is still a challenge, and no list of suggestions on the home's role in helping the child learn to read can avoid some "don't's," as warning against practices that interfere with learning.

Avoid pressuring your child. If he wants to reread books he especially likes or chooses books that you feel are too easy for him, let *him* make the choice. Remember that repetition helps reinforce both learning and his sense of accomplishment. Don't discourage your beginning reader if

he points to words on the page; let his teacher help him through this stage. Avoid making such defeating comparisons to other children as "When Susan was your age. . . ."

Don't use reading as a bribe, a threat, or a punishment. Instead, praise your child's efforts and willingness. Help him feel pride in his work habits and progress. Don't gloat over the number of books he reads, ignoring their quality or his degree of enjoyment. Make reading a regular part of his day, but be reasonable and flexible about scheduling. Adjust for special activities, and be alert to recognize favorable and unfavorable moments. Help him maintain a healthy balance of work, play and rest. Remember that enjoyment in reading is what's most important: it feeds on itself. Help your child to find reading important for its own sake, and show that you feel the same way.

Still another guideline is basic (for the sake of the child, not the school): Uphold your child's confidence in the school. Don't pry into his school activities at times when he shows no readiness or willingness to talk about them. Avoid asking questions that he can't answer or whose effect is to show him up, such as "Why haven't you gotten your first reader?" Save your questions on the methods being used and his progress in reading for his teacher and don't display disapproval of them to your child. He needs to feel secure, to have his confidence in school boosted rather than undermined. But do talk over your concerns with his teacher. Home-school understanding and cooperation are important contributors to a good learning environment.

Most important of all, remember that the school can never make up for what a child is not getting at home. A home atmosphere of eagerness to learn is contagious; fortunately, it is also simple, natural, and fun. All it takes is time and genuine interest in your child.

A home that encourages readiness for learning and reading will include the child from his earliest days in everyday family doings, with conversation about what you're doing and room for him to contribute. Common experiences such as television news, the weather, shopping trips, are capitalized on by talking about them. Questions that arise from events and conversation are used as a base for "looking it up," for reading, for borrowing more books from the library. Special trips and outings help the child build a rich background of first-hand experiences to support language and concept development. Reading, looking at pictures, listening to recordings, should be a natural part of these experiences. Use a road map or atlas to plan a trip, and books to learn about the place to be visited or to follow up going to the circus. This approach helps children become aware that books and reading are important, normal parts of everyday life, that you value them, and that "there's a book about everything"—all of which help to build readiness for reading.

Ready availability of reading materials plays a large part in what and how much the child reads. Make sure your child has appealing books and magazines around him all the time. Nothing replaces the satisfaction of owning some books, with the parent and child choosing them together. Fortunately, lots of good paperback children's books are available to ease the strain on the family budget. Gifts of books can help a child develop pride in books of his own and in himself as a reader. He will look forward to chances to choose his own books at the bookstore or through membership in a children's book club. A subscription to a children's magazine adds the experience of getting his own mail and looking forward to new issues. Be sure to provide the child with a place to keep his own special books.

The home library alone, however, cannot satisfy a child's needs and interests. Regular visits to the children's room of the public library should become a family affair—and not just to borrow books. The library offers many services that you can use. Library programs for children—storytelling, picture book programs, films—offer valuable reading stimulation and language learning, as well as the experience of being in a group. Exploration of the library shelves to find just the right book helps the child learn more about how many new areas books can open up for him. Let your child choose for himself; suggest but don't force any book on him. Don't restrict him to books you think are easy enough or hard enough for him as he begins to read. Let interest be the basis for choice. Unless your child is interested in what he reads, reading soon begins to lose appeal. Your chief role will be to make sure that he has an opportunity to develop a variety of interests and then link them to books: picture books and books for you to read aloud to him, information books, and easy stories for him to read to himself.

Find out about the school library, or media center, in your child's school. Check with his teacher or librarian to find out how and when children may use it and what materials can be borrowed. Be sure to visit the library when you go to school, and talk with the librarian about all the kinds of programs provided for your child. Find out whether the school library offers extended hours of service after school, or a summer reading program in which your child may participate. Encourage your child to talk about what he does in the library. Show interest in the books and other materials he brings home (many school libraries now circulate films and records, too).

Read his books so you can talk them over with him, informally. Help him develop responsibility by providing a place for the things he brings home from school and giving him reminders about taking them back.

Check your home for conditions favorable to reading. Are older brothers and sisters encouraged to share books with the young child? Is there a quiet place for reading, away from the television set or noisy games? Does the family watch television programs together and then talk them over? Do questions raised by news or weather or family experiences lead to looking up information in a book? Does a new hobby lead to a trip to the library to borrow a book? Are family reading times planned, when parents read aloud to the whole family a book of interest to them all? Does father share in these experiences, including bedtime reading to the youngest?

As a member of a family who talk and read together, who value reading, the child naturally absorbs learning that builds a foundation for reading and supports the school's program in teaching him to read. A rich background of experiences, language and concept development, listening skills, satisfying experiences with books, a desire to read for himself, and confidence in himself as a learner—all these are gifts any home can give a child.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

3. READING GAMES TO PLAY AT HOME

By Nancy Larrick

Learning to read begins at home long before a little one goes to school. Many kindergarten and first-grade teachers say a child's success in reading depends largely on the attitude toward reading he has picked up at home. If he sees adults reading, he concludes that reading is worth doing. If he has been read to and has handled books and magazines, he has learned that reading is good fun and something that he will be able to do himself. This sense of anticipation through involvement is a most important aid to a child's success in reading.

Involvement can begin as soon as the child is old enough to listen to words and then repeat a few himself. When he hears a bedtime song or even a singing commercial on television, he is getting the rhythm of language he will soon repeat himself. Every word he learns to say or sing will be an easier word for him to read when he sees it in print. If he knows the words of a song or even a singing game, he can quickly learn to read those words because they are familiar to him.

The child who talks fluently is usually the one who is ready to read when he goes to school. The parent who encourages a child to talk and who learns to be a good listener is providing the best possible foundation for reading. Singing together is another good way to help a child develop facility with words. The song may be as old as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," but if it gets the child involved it serves a purpose. Even better are the songs that invite some movement or the addition of new lines or stanzas. For example, "The wheels of the bus go round and round, round and round," and later, "The people on the bus go up and down, up and down," and "The driver of the bus says, Step to the rear. Step to the rear." The possibilities are endless, and so is the pleasure for children who are also sharpening their language skills for later reading lessons.

Children pick up songs and chants from other children on the street or in the playground, such as counting-out rhymes, alphabet rhymes, jump-rope jingles, nonsense verses and all the rest. They love to repeat them and, given the opportunity, revel in teaching them to others. If they have mastered the old tongue twisters ("Betty Barter bought some butter" or "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck"), they are learning to pronounce words clearly and detect the different sounds in words.

Storytelling is another valuable aid to reading. Many parents go back to the stories they heard as children and retell them at bedtime or perhaps during a 10-minute rest break during the day. Others learn to create a story on demand, one about their own childhood, perhaps, or an imaginary tale about the runaway subway train or the bus that went to school. Children who hear such simple stories of make-believe will often start creating their own about the chair that broke its leg or the kettle that learned to sing. The inspiration to tell a story is, of course, much greater when there is a sympathetic iistener.

The child who is learning to speak fluently and enjoy the sound of language soon becomes interested in words in print. When he knows his name and can say it clearly, he might like to see it printed out in big letters on a piece of cardboard which he can keep for his own. A magic marker is ideal for recording key words he may ask for: "bus" for example, if he is singing "The wheels of the bus go round and round." Don't be surprised if a 4-year-old asks for a word like "astronaut" instead of "dog" or "cat." Honor his request for the word that is most important to him, and you'll strengthen his interest in reading.

At the same time, children can be encouraged to see the words in print which are all around them—on the bread wrapper, the box of salt, the box of cereal or the automobile. On the street take time to identify street names, traffic signs, and the key word on a store window (shoes, drugs, or food, for example). Often these same words show up in newspaper ads in big letters with pictures which make reading easier. Sometimes a child enjoys using a heavy crayon to circle the one or two words he knows by sight and then to add new ones to his own special list.

As children develop their own skill with words, they are ready to listen to stories read

from books. For many youngsters the most cherished part of the day is the time when a parent reads aloud. Parent and child can look at the pictures together, talk about the story or just read it again. The youngest will enjoy pointing to certain pictures and helping to turn the pages. After hearing a simple story several times, the young listener will soon be able to prompt the adult reader who makes a mistake with even one word. Fortunately it is much easier nowadays to find good children's books than it used to be. They can be borrowed without charge from the public library and the school library. Also, there are now hundreds of good paperback books for children, ranging from 35¢ to 75¢ each and often sold at school.

Reading aloud is just the beginning. The child who enjoys the story will usually ask for it a second or even a third time. Many children then like to go back to a pleasant game of locate-and-identify. If the book you are reading is *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey, for example, a child will enjoy a search for his favorite picture of the ducklings and then a try at counting the ducklings in the picture. Can we find a picture of the big ducks flying? Where is the picture of Michael, the policeman? Certain questions will help bring out the child's own experiences: Do you remember when you went to the park, too? How can you tell the ducklings are having fun in this picture? Tell me when you had just as much fun as the ducklings are having.

The important thing is to bring out the child's pleasure through involvement and participation in the story. The questions should be those which draw him out, not those right-or-wrong questions which show up his mistakes. Nothing good comes from closing the book and giving a cross-examination: What kind of ducks are in the story? How many ducks were there? and so on. That will turn almost any youngster away from books and reading. Another possibility is to show a child how he and his friends can act out certain scenes of the story. For example, they could play the scene in which Michael stops traffic so the duck family can cross the street in safety.

Another favorite story for pre-schoolers is *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina, which tells of a cap peddler whose caps are stolen while he takes a nap under a tree full of monkeys. Children love to make a pile of paper caps and then play the part of the mischievous monkeys as they retell the story in their own words. Those who have had this kind of experience are quick to learn to read such key words as *cap, monkey,* and *peddler.* Even more important they learn that the printed pages of a book provide good entertainment that you can return to again and again.

Not every child's book brings instant appreciation from the young listener, and no amount of adult persuasion will convert a negative attitude into genuine enthusiasm. Sometimes a book is rejected because the subject is not appealing. The moon rocket enthusiast at 5 may feel that ducklings are beneath him; his city cousin may prefer the urban setting of *The Two Reds* by Will Lipkind and Nicholas Mordvinoff to the rural scene in *Play With Me* by Marie Hall Ets. Or it may be that the child is simply not in the mood to sit still and listen. When that happens, respect his wishes. Next time, ask him to help in choosing a book to read or reread. Invite him to turn the pages and tell you what he likes about the story and what it suggests from his own experience.

The more he talks and the more he becomes involved in books at home the more likely he is to become a happy reader at school.

Dr. Larrick, author of **A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading,** *is a national reading consultant.*

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Parents and Beginning Readers

4. KINDERGARTEN-- AN IMPORTANT PRE-READING STEP

By Dr. Lucile Lindberg

"But they play all day. I wanted my child to be in a kindergarten where they learn!"

This is a comment made frequently by mothers as they watch boys and girls in a good kindergarten. What they usually mean is, "This is very pleasant and I'm glad he is happy. I can see that he is being given every opportunity to develop a strong, healthy body. He is acquiring many important social skills. But I wanted more than this. I want him to get the skills he will need for reading. The sooner he learns to read the more comfortable I shall feel!"

Of course we want our boys and girls to learn to read. So much of what they do later on in school depends upon how they are able to read.

Many people have the idea that reading can be taught only through formal methods involving set procedures and materials. It is hard to understand that a child in kindergarten, which emphasizes a great variety of activities with a teacher who is concerned with children's learning, is probably moving more rapidly into reading than a child who is bombarded with formal exercise in reading. Much learning takes place through play in kindergarten.

It isn't only learning to read words which is important to a child. He must understand the meaning behind what he reads in order to develop a set of standards about what is worth reading, and to feel power and enthusiasm as he reads.

There are many young persons in universities today who read rapidly and gather facts accurately, but who do not show much depth in their use of what they have read. They say the proper words and they get good grades, but their reading ability does not appear to yield competence in dealing with problems. They seem to lack both enthusiasm and initiative. Their early schooling might have helped them develop the attitudes they seem to lack. How a child learns to read makes a difference.

To the casual observer reading may not seem to be a part of the daily program, but many kindergarten activities are reading in disguise. These activities help boys and girls move into reading by giving a foundation in language which will take them far beyond the mere mechanics.

Watch a child painting at an easel. He shows delight as he mixes the paint, making it lighter, lighter and still lighter or darker and ~~yet~~ darker. What subtle differentiations he is making. What an awareness of difference he develops, differences created by him. Watch as he makes a wide sweep with the brush then turns it to get a narrow line, then wide, then narrow. What fun! And what possibilities for learning! There are formal exercises which have been designed to train a child in differentiating, but in this kind of situation he is able to discover many kinds of differences for himself. The learning is not something which is pushed on him. Instead, he reaches out to learn and gets a sense of himself as an explorer for knowledge, as a person who is capable of reaching for ever greater learnings. As he continues to paint he creates shapes, his own shapes. Here he can gain a beginning in the forming of symbols. The ABC's are the symbols he will be using in reading, but these will have more meaning for him if he has had many opportunities to create picture symbols.

As he paints he is having an early experience in writing. Perhaps he isn't writing words, but he is experiencing what it is to express himself on paper. He grasps the brush clumsily at first, trying one way and then another of holding it until he develops control over its movement.

In the same kindergarten room other children are playing with dough. They pound and form it into shapes, and make different shapes with cookie cutters. As they produce these same shapes again and again they develop awareness of many types of shapes, distinguishing the characteristics of each in their play. This is very important as they later move into recognizing *b*, *d*, *a* or *p*. By beginning with large forms, which they can handle, they develop their abilities to recognize shapes through both sight and touch.

A simple jigsaw puzzle also teaches a child something about his abilities. He is learning the difference between shapes as he matches each piece to the space where it fits. He continues to

do the puzzle even after he has mastered it and can do it easily. He has developed a skill and he enjoys using it. How much more opportunity here for drill, self-initiated drill, than if he were to do an exercise in a workbook following his teacher's directions. The puzzle is self-testing. He can tell when it is done correctly. He can move on to a more difficult one when he feels competent to do so. Learning for him, as he works the puzzle, comes naturally and without the worry that he may not be able to do what is expected of him.

Watch boys and girls in dress-up clothes pretending that they are fathers, mothers, repair men, beauty operators. Skills useful in reading are being acquired. Boys and girls learn a great deal from each other in this dramatic play. They find that fathers and mothers behave in many different ways, that there are many kinds of adult roles. All of this can help them move into an understanding of reading where characters in books may have experiences which vary from their own.

This sort of play also offers an opportunity for vocabulary building. Here a child can learn many more words than he would be likely to learn in formalized vocabulary drill and learn them in a way which will be more helpful to him. In his play the words have greater meaning and he uses them naturally and easily. Each bit of play has its own technical vocabulary. A teacher introducing pieces of equipment or new words may ask, "Do you need a stethoscope? Is it pneumonia or arthritis? Where are you going? What kinds of permanent waves do you give?" Sometimes the written word is introduced by making a label saying hospital, ambulance, doctor's office or shoe store.

In one kindergarten attention was called to Susie's blue dress. "It isn't blue," she said, "It's aqua." "I have a dress that color, only we call it turquoise," her friend stated. Turquoise is more blue, aqua is more green. The teacher joined in, "This dress I am wearing is teal blue. The coat I wear on the playground is sometimes called wedgewood blue." The boys and girls began to identify the many blues they were wearing: dark blue, light blue, medium blue, sky blue, royal blue, navy blue. What a richness in language boys and girls can acquire with a teacher who helps them to become more precise in their choice of words.

Boys and girls in another kindergarten lay on the grass looking up at the clouds. The teacher helped identify them. "Cumulus, nimbus," they called out. Another whole world of knowledge was opening up to them, raising questions that can later be answered by reading.

Very important, too, are the make-believe words a child creates for himself. His imitation of a rumbling mountain-slide or the woosh of a jet plane help him to manipulate sounds. He plays with the language. Using his very own words a child builds a background in phonics, that is, letter sounds. His play becomes reading in disguise.

Children delight in new words which are used to enrich their play. We often hear these words said repeatedly because they are such fun. A large and varied vocabulary does help in reading. Just as important is facility in language as they hear and later repeat these same wonderful words. They learn many poems, not because anyone asks them to do so, but because it is fun to feel the words flowing out of their mouths in such a delightful rhythm. These boys and girls acquire depth in use of language in a natural way instead of through an artificial, contrived exercise.

Singing, too, can be a very important part of the learning-to-read process. We hear children singing as they build a boat with blocks. The teacher sings as she helps children put on their coats. Sometimes everyone sings. Boys and girls who don't speak much often forget themselves and join in as the songs flow out. Those who talk incessantly enjoy the discipline of using words in rhythm. What better beginning reading could we have than this disguised drill with marvelous words, beautifully put together.

Rhythmic movement has its place in the development of a good reader. Every part of the body affects every other part. Ease in reading depends upon rhythmic movements. We wish to avoid a choppy word, word, word effect. Movement as boys and girls run and tumble on the grass, as they run sand through their fingers, as they push finger paint across paper or as they swing and sway to the beat of a drum are all a part of learning to read well.

Then of course there are story times. Times when a teacher reads to two or three are much to be treasured. All can enjoy the book together. As the pages turn a child associates an idea with a picture. It is possible for him to become aware that pictures represent real objects. Soon he will learn that words also can represent real objects.

Many times all gather together to hear stories. Some are read for the first time. Others have been read to the groups dozens of times. A child becomes so familiar with the words that he can say them as the pages are turned, not because he knows what each word is but because he knows that what is on the page does say something; and that words say exactly the same thing each time they are used is an important part of learning to read.

Almost anywhere we look in a good kindergarten we find reading in disguise. After we

become aware of what the basic foundations in reading are we find it isn't really disguised at all. The reading activities are everywhere. Boys and girls are noting differences, recognizing shapes, matching forms, learning to use new words and developing a sense of the structure of language. When they are playing in the sand, at the workbench, in the playhouse, they are learning skills used in reading. How wonderful to learn them in such situations, for at this age the attitudes of a lifetime are being developed. They are learning what reading can do for them. They are finding out that it is an enjoyable process. They enjoy the skills which are needed for reading and sense the excitement involved in discovering for themselves what words can do. As their appetites for these activities are whetted through their play, some of them may move to more concentrated work because they like the feel of it.

Boys and girls who have had an opportunity to use many media in their play can go into first grade with their background in reading highly developed. In many instances they are already reading, having discovered the reading process themselves through their many activities. This makes strong readers. In some instances, children do not read whole stories, but they recognize many words and letters. This gives them a good start. Most important of all they know what reading is and they feel capable of mastering it. Their feelings of satisfaction with their own abilities as they continue to read are not disguised. For them reading is an exciting adventure. The school years ahead will be filled with explorations which they themselves initiate.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

5. READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN FIRST GRADE

By Celestia Davis

The ability to read does not suddenly come when your child enters the first grade. Whether a child learns to read easily and *wants* to read depends upon the home as well as the school. Parents may be wondering what they can do to help and what they can expect in the first half year.

By January, your child will be able to read words he knows in short stories. These may be in paperbacks, in charts prepared by the teacher, or in books the child writes himself, depending upon the school's approach. The basic reading skills will usually be the same. The approach used may depend upon what spoken words your child already knows and how many. It is not enough that he might be able to say the printed word. He must also be able to understand the meaning of it.

Reading is a part of the child's natural language development. Success in reading depends upon his ability to listen and speak. His teacher will encourage him to develop his listening and speaking skills. He will hear and respond to sounds in the classroom and on the playground. He will listen to records and follow the directions which may tell him to hop, skip, jump, sit, or form a circle, sit in a row, or any number of things.

Others will listen while he speaks. He will name objects in the school room. He may tell stories to others in order to practice the new words he learns at school. He will share with others experiences about his pets, his walks to school, or his school work.

During his first few weeks of school you may be able to help him with language development by listening to him tell what happened at school, by listening to stories he makes up, by talking with him about the things he sees and hears, and by reading stories to him and answering questions he asks about them.

The teacher will listen to how your child speaks in order to determine the language he can use and understand. A pupil needs to be able to hear all of the sounds his language uses. The teacher will use his own words to develop the child's sense of sound. She will probably start with the sound of his name and ask him what other things he sees in the room that start like his name: Dick, door, desk. She may then show him pictures of objects that start with the same or different sounds. She also will read stories and poems and she will encourage the use of rhymes and jingles in the classroom and on the playground. She may ask him to finish lines with words that rhyme or sound the same in order to teach the idea of like sounds.

At home you can continue this sound awareness by saying, "I see something that looks like a ball. What do you see that starts like the word ball starts?" A bat? A balloon? A book? Your child may be able to bring to you a number of things in the room which start with the same sounds, such as pan, pen, pencil, paper, etc. These and similar exercises will help him learn to distinguish sounds.

From the words that *sound* alike, the teacher will provide printed symbols of words that *look* alike or look different. Your child will move naturally into this task if the proper readiness for it has been made. The words and sentence structures of the child's own speech will be used in order for him to understand the words and sentences. He will learn to sort objects, animals, etc., into common groups by pictures, words, and printed symbols. He will discover the likenesses and differences in these objects such as color, kinds, and sizes. These experiences will help him understand word families, such as name, tame, same, game, etc.

The teacher will provide written exercises that contain words that look alike for him to match, or that ask him to mark the word that is different than the others in a row. He may also match printed letters both capital and lower case, as well as words and groups of words.

At home you may want to cut letters, words, or groups of words from the newspaper for your child to match. He may do this by placing them on a table or by pasting them in rows on paper. Headlines rather than small type are best for this.

At this point you might help your child relate familiar signs in his world to spoken words: signs such as those at bus stops, street signs, or street lights. Knowledge of letters and sounds used together will help him to unlock, or know on sight, words when used in a familiar setting. Good reading depends greatly upon being able to recognize instantly the words he already knows. It takes many times of seeing the printed form of a word together with the spoken word before the child will know it instantly. All good readers have this ability to read many words at sight and have to stop only once in a while to make out a new word. The skill of recognizing a word on sight is called visual perception or visual discrimination.

At the same time that the instruction in visual discrimination is in progress, the teacher will be showing pupils the way the printed word is arranged on the page from left to right by moving her hand under the printed lines as she reads aloud a story from a book or an article printed on the chart or blackboard. Your child will be learning the idea of top-to-bottom and left-to-right eye movements across the page. He will learn that the blank spaces between words are the boundary lines of words. He will also practice this in his "readiness" book or on a work sheet.

The success or failure of beginning reading depends upon the success of the "readiness" period. Whether or not he continues to do well in school depends a great deal upon how well he is prepared in these early stages. His interest in reading may also depend upon these first experiences. There will be a "readiness" period for each new learning experience throughout his entire schooling.

The child will be taught several skills for helping him unlock new words by himself. These skills are called word recognition skills: sounding out words (phonics), noticing the way a word is put together (word structure), and being able to use the meaning clues in the story.

In order to learn to use the meaning clues on the printed page, the teacher will help your child move carefully from the spoken word to the written word. She may read most of the story or line to him, hold up a printed clue (a single letter), and have him give a word that would start with that letter and have meaning in the sentence. Or she may have him finish a sentence by filling in a missing word, such as, "Mary said she likes to eat c_____." (candy, cake, custard)

You may want to help him practice getting meaning from the context by using questions such as, "What is on the table?" The response might be, "A dish is on the table." Then you might ask, "What else could be on the table and start like dish?" Or you might suggest, "I am going to put the_____on the table." (dishes, cups, plates, etc.) You might want to continue by saying, "I am going to set the table with something that starts like pans." (plates)

Phonics is taught in a practical way, usually in connection with words in sentences that pupils already know. Your child will learn phonics by learning letter sounds singly and in clusters or groups. The ones he will be expected to learn will be drawn from whole words he already knows. In order for him to use phonics, he must be able to use the skills learned during the "readiness" period, which are hearing the differences in sounds and seeing the differences in printed words. Phonics is the skill of sounding out printed words. He will be able to recognize words that start the same, such as "take," "tall," and "Tom," and words that end the same, such as "head," "read," and "word." He will begin to substitute sounds in words to make new words. He will change "bat" to "cat" then to "sat."

To practice this skill, the teacher may put the word "red" on the board. She may say, "This is a word you haven't had yet but you can make out what it is. What letter does it begin with? I will read a sentence and leave out this word at the end. When I stop, think of a word that begins with an "r" sound and ends with a "d" sound and makes sense. The car is_____." (red)

Word structure is the study of changes within a word that make a difference in its meaning. This skill will help your child from the first grade on and will be expanded every year. It means learning the root word or base word and the added parts. It will help him read words like "help," the root word, "helps," "helped," "helping," "helpful," "unhelpful." He will learn to join two words together to make one word such as "today," "doghouse," "backyard," and "playhouse." He will read words like "can't," "let's," "I'm," and other contractions.

The teacher may write sentences on the board that can be completed by adding appropriate endings to words as in the sentence, "The child was play___." (ing, ed, s) She may place a number of words in an envelope that could be joined together to make one word that is known to the child, such as "air," "plane," "base," "ball," "class," "room," and others the pupils can read. They will put these together to form words.

His first lessons in reading printed stories or articles will probably be in materials called pre-primers. These are usually paperback books, small and easy to handle, containing pictures which interest pupils, and few printed words. The sentences will be simple and direct but meaningful. The words will be repeated again and again to make the reading progress easier. Only one idea

for meaning will be presented in each lesson. There are usually several pre-primers in a series. In these books he will learn to read for different purposes. He will learn to read to get the main idea or notice important details, to understand the order in which something happened, to find out what happened next, or to decide what caused it to happen. He may be able to read and summarize the story or article. These are the same skills he will need to read and understand the materials used in subjects he will study in upper elementary and secondary schools.

In order to help your child get meaning from what he reads, the teacher will give careful instruction to him as he starts to read the story. She may ask him to look at the picture and tell her a story about it. She will then be able to tell whether or not he understands the idea that she hopes to get across with this particular story. The teacher will then teach or review any word or words that she thinks may be hard for him to read. She will introduce the story in such an interesting way that he will want to read it. They will talk about it together and she may ask him to read to find the answer to a question. He will get to read the story over to himself before he finds the part that answers the question she asked.

Some of the reading lessons will be planned for groups of children and some will be planned for pupils to do alone or with one partner. Usually skill development and oral reading will be planned for small groups of five or six children. Pupils enjoy reading and sharing stories with each other. Oral reading or reading aloud is preferred by most teachers for pupils who are learning to use books, using left-to-right eye movements, and dropping down to the next line of print.

At home the child may be able to read aloud to you from some books. More of these are now available in libraries and stores than there used to be.

Your child could also tell you a story as you write it down, printing the words in a notebook for him to read back to you. He might enjoy drawing pictures that would help him tell the story to you and others. Your interest in hearing him read will be a most important help in his growing in reading ability.

The ability to read does not happen suddenly. The child learns to read through a series of basic reading skills that are taught: primarily how to unlock unfamiliar words (word recognition) and how to get meaning from the printed page (comprehension). The steps must be gradual and continuous. There must be much practice and repetition. Children do not all learn at the same rate or in the same ways, but once your child is reading short simple printed sentences, he will have a good start in reading.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

6. READING READINESS-- WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT

By Dr. Marjorie Seddon Johnson

Reading readiness tests are designed to measure some factors which are likely to be related to success in beginning reading. Results of a test on your prereading child, however, be they good or bad, carry no guarantees of his success or difficulty in learning to read. For instance, the child who can recognize and name letters will be more likely to learn to read than will the child who does not know the letters. Nevertheless, lots of small children "know their letters," but cannot read and many children can read, but do not recognize all the letters, even in words they know.

Probably the reason that letter naming is a good sign of reading success lies in the experiences a child has had along the road to his knowing the letters. Perhaps parents, older brothers and sisters, and others among whom he is growing up have stimulated his curiosity about the world around him generally. He probably asked many questions about letters as well as everything else he saw or heard or imagined. Such a child can be a joy to live with, a super-irritant, and a real puzzler all rolled into one; but take heart, he's a learner! He learns things no one ever set out to teach him and his attitude toward his world, his fund of general information, his positive associations with others, and his continuing drive to find out are probably the important factors for his success. Knowing the letters is simply one by-product.

In contrast, the child who has had only the experience of someone sitting down and drilling him on letter forms and names might learn them but still be totally unprepared for reading. He may have no real desire to learn, having never enjoyed the pleasures of discovery. Because reading readiness tests can measure only certain specific results of the child's experiences, they often give misleading information.

What kinds of tasks are there in reading readiness tests? What does the child have to do when he takes one? Some are given to each child individually. Others are given to whole classes at a time, often at the end of kindergarten, and sometimes as a part of the first grade program. They may include sections to measure his attention span, his knowledge of letters, his ability to tell whether words look or sound alike or different, his ability to copy simple figures or understand word meanings. All require him to be able to understand and follow directions. Sometimes the administration of a reading test shows nothing about any of the specific factors supposedly being measured, but simply demonstrates that the child does not understand what he is supposed to do and therefore is completely unable to perform on the test. In other cases, test administration uncovers the fact that the child cannot sit still and stick with the job long enough to let you know what he knows and what he does not know.

Many of the items on most reading readiness tests require the child to listen to a question and then select, from several choices, a picture which would answer the question. In response to "Which animal gives us milk?" he is to mark the cow, not the horse or hen or monkey. Another common task is a matching one: "Mark all the horses that look just like the first one in the row." "Find all the words that are the same as the first word." The child is often asked to tell whether things are alike or different. The examiner may say two words, *sand-send,* and ask the child, "Are they the same or different?"

The teacher who gives a readiness test hopes to find out many things in general about the child. First, can he understand what he is being asked to do, the idea of "same or different," "largest and smallest" or whatever judgment he is being asked to make? Then, having understood, does he follow directions? Some children could not care less about the specific instructions they receive. Tell him, "Put a line *under* . . ." and he puts a line *around.* Although he understands both *under* and *around,* they just do not matter to him. Such a child can get a zero on a test on which he has marked all the correct items because he did not mark them in the correct way. The teacher knows this child may have trouble learning. A third question is whether or not the child can pay attention to the task over a period of time and persist in his efforts, even when he runs into trouble. He will need to do all these things if he is to have successful learning experiences. If

the child has trouble understanding what he is to do in the test, he will probably have trouble understanding many things included in the instructional program in reading. If he cannot pay attention long enough to do the test, he will probably not be able to attend to instruction. Thus the teacher can pick up valuable clues to the child's needs–what she must do to get him ready for reading and other learning as well.

If the child has really been able to perform on the test, particular items and sections can yield more concrete information. The teacher may find that the child notices differences in beginning and ending sounds in words, but not in the vowel sounds in the middle. He knew *sand* and *band* were different, but thought *sand* and *send* sounded alike. He has a good background of experience in things around the home, but very little knowledge of the world outside. He can discriminate picture materials well, but he fails to see differences in somewhat similar word forms. He knows all the letters, but those that are alike except for direction–b, d, p, g.

The nature of the detailed information the teacher can get depends on the test used. Some measure many areas, some few. Some measure in depth, some just touch the surface. Regardless of the test, however, the teacher will be left with more questions about the child than answers. A reading test should be considered only a quick screening of the child's progress, to point the directions for further observations, and not a final determiner of his fate as a reader.

What do the scores and ratings from these tests mean? The ratings deal with *chances* of success based on what other children with the same score or rating have done. When tests are designed, they are administered to sample groups of children selected to represent all children. In the case of a readiness test, these children are later given reading achievement tests to see how well they actually learned, and comparisons are made between their readiness and the later actual reading scores. If the children who had excellent reading scores had scored, on the average, 45 points on the readiness test, a score of 45 might be rated *excellent.* That is, *the chances* are excellent that someone who gets this score or better will succeed with reading. If the children who did extremely poorly on the reading achievement test had, on the average, scores of 15, then that score might be assigned a very poor rating. That is, the chances are very poor that someone who gets this score or less will succeed in reading. The scores are indicating probabilities, not certainties. They are stating these probabilities about "children who score at this level," but not about one child specifically.

Both the parents and teachers are concerned about *their* children, not children on the average. Consequently, neither can look upon the "rating" as the important source of information. The real job is to see why each child got the rating he did. What are the strengths on which he can build? What are his areas of weakness? What help does he need?

Parents can help prepare their children for success on the reading readiness tests and in learning to read. There are things which can be done for and with a child from his very earliest days. A child who is talked with, not talked at, learns to respond. He searches out the meanings intended because he enjoys communication with others. He knows early that he is a person and it is important to those around him that he understand. Any activity which helps a child to handle his language with ease and pleasure is an aid to his readiness for reading and his future success as a reader. Most of these activities can be part of the normal daily life at home. Most of them are informal in nature and are easy to think up.

Language games are fun. Any child can get caught up in the spirit of a rhyming contest. Have the child start by naming a word. You give a word that rhymes with his and then it's his turn again. When he runs out of real words to use, he'll throw in some made up for the occasion and get a real kick out of it. He'll learn to enjoy words. Other games can help him learn beginning sounds of words. You can plan a trip to Turkey–but, of course, to Turkey you can take your top, your tie, and your toaster, but not your doll or your bike. Dolls and dogs and dishes can go to Detroit. Bikes, babies and butter are fine for Boston, but food and fans are on a Philadelphia trip. Making up funny names, which rhyme or start the same way, is another chance for fun.

Another important area, closely linked to language, is the child's ability to think. What can parents do to make their children thinkers? Again, there are lots of informal activities which can help children become observers of their world and good thinkers about it. Real understanding of concepts like *in* and *out, up* and *down,* can be built by playing in-and-out games or up-and-down games. Concepts of colors and shapes can be strengthened through "I see something blue or round" games. Even the organization of the kitchen cupboards and drawers can be used to help children understand likenesses, differences, functions of objects, and classifications. Instead of "Put it there," mother can use, "Why do you think it belongs there? What else is in that drawer? Is this another . . .?" In this way the child is learning to look, to think about what he sees, to compare and to understand. These are all essentials in his future learning.

Learning demands acceptance of responsibility. Parents can help a child get ready for school and for reading by expecting him to be a responsible person, at his own level of capability, of course. Seeing himself as responsible will give him a positive picture of himself, the kind of self-concept which will help him throughout life. As a parent, don't do *for* a child what you can *help him to do* for himself. Help him so that he learns *how,* rather than helping him merely to get the job done. It will be harder sometimes than doing it yourself, but well worth it in terms of his independence and his feelings about his competence and worth. Never ask the child to do things which he can't possibly do. See that he has jobs to do that make life better for the whole family, but don't give him jobs that are too much for him. Give him ones he can learn to do well.

Trust a child as a human being who can learn, who wants to learn, who wants to be a responsible, thinking member of his society. Stimulate his curiosity and help him satisfy it. Help him to understand language and use it with pleasure and pride. Communicate with him, and enjoy, yourself, the whole communication process with him. If you do, you'll find he probably lives up to your expectations for him and "reading readiness" will be no problem for him.

Dr. Johnson is professor of Education and director of the Reading Clinic at Temple University.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

7. A PRIMER FOR PARENTS ON READING METHODS

By Dr. Dorothy M. Dietrich

There are many methods of teaching reading to children and there are as many variations of each method as there are teachers and children. Research tells us that there is no one best way to teach reading. Children learn best when methods are fitted to their own special needs, experience, interest, ways of learning, physical, mental, and emotional health, and other factors.

The methods used to teach reading will depend upon:

School Policy–Some boards of education prescribe a particular method by which children are to be taught to read. Others provide the teacher with a wide variety of resources and let her decide which method is best for the children she teaches. Many boards adopt policies somewhere between these two.

Materials–The teaching-learning style of a school's reading program depends largely on the quality and quantity of materials available to the teachers. If a school has only a single basal reading series and has a limited library or no library at all, then both children and teachers are limited in their efforts.

Teacher Training–Teachers, who have a wide background and good training in reading skills, methods and materials, have the equipment they need to offer a reading program designed to meet the individual needs of pupils. Several of the more widely used methods are described below.

A *basal reading approach* consists of a series of grade level readers with skills planned for introduction in logical order by the teacher. The basal reader helps the child to learn how to approach new words, increase his vocabulary and his comprehension.

A series usually contains one or more reading readiness books to be used in kindergarten and/or first grade. These are followed by several pre-primers, a primer and a first reader, all for use primarily in first grade. There are either one or two books for each grade thereafter. Workbooks or worksheets enable the pupils to practice the skills introduced by the teacher. Some series now have games, supplementary books, filmstrips, and records to extend pupils' learning, and often these can be taken home.

A teacher's manual accompanies the series and helps the teacher plan her reading lesson. It assists her in providing background knowledge the pupil may need before reading the story, suggests discussion questions about what the pupils have read and gives other activities pupils might engage in if they need extra help.

The basal reading series provides for a flexible teaching program, if the teacher uses it imaginatively. Instead of just moving children routinely from one book to the next, the teacher is encouraged to use additional reading matter related to other subjects such as science, social studies, and literature, for practice and reinforcement of skills. She carefully supervises the student as he completes his workbook. These drills help her to recognize the child's strengths and weaknesses, so that she can put more emphasis on the aspects with which he needs the most help.

Recent changes in design of basal reader programs include more attention to teaching skills for learning new words through a phonetic or linguistic approach, and this emphasis is begun earlier so that most basals have completed this part of the program by the end of the third reader. Greater attention is being given to getting the child to think about what he reads and helping him to understand it. Vocabularies are less limited and the material has more content and range of interest.

The *Language-Experience approach* uses all four elements of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and relates them to the child's everyday experiences. Children are encouraged to use all of their five senses to discover the world about them and are then helped to put their discoveries into words.

Early in the program the entire class shares a common experience and dictates a story about it. Later, children work together in small groups and as individuals. Teachers, teachers' aides, older children, sometimes using tape recorders, write

down the stories so the children can read and reread them, thus learning basic skills: how to recognize letters used to express sounds, sounds in words, sentence patterns and so on. Children are encouraged to read a wide variety of books, and their own stories are often sent home to be read to parents. There is no set curriculum or order in which skills are learned. Skills are taught as they are needed to read the stories dictated, so the child senses the reward for learning them immediately. In this method much depends upon the teacher's ability to plan lessons so that the material contains opportunities for teaching all the necessary skills.

With this approach the children's interest and motivation is usually very high. They learn early that reading is part of the total communication pattern. What is said can be written, what is written can be read, and what is read can be heard by others. With this approach reading can easily be integrated with other subjects and become a part of the total learning process.

Individualized Reading programs are an outgrowth of research that has shown the vast differences between individuals of the same age insofar as their ability, rate of learning and interests are concerned. Individualized reading programs are geared to the needs of each child.

Children in an individualized program usually learn the basic reading skills by using basal readers, the language-experience approach, or other methods. Then children may select the books they want to read aloud to a friend or to themselves. At first the teacher helps with book selection; quite soon most children can choose well for themselves. It becomes the child's responsibility to complete the book and find some way to share it with the teacher or his classmates. Every week the teacher schedules at least one meeting alone with each child to discuss the book he is reading with him. She listens to him read aloud and makes a record of his progress and problems. If a child needs more help he will work with the teacher more often. He may also be placed in a group of children who work together because they need help with the same specific skills, at a particular time.

This instruction on a one-to-one basis and in small groups is the main advantage of the Individualized Reading Program. It enables a variety of different methods to be adapted to each child's needs; it is highly motivational since it gives each child an opportunity to read books of his own choice at his own pace; and it helps him learn to share with other children.

Programmed Instruction is based on the use of instructional material that has been broken into very small, ordered steps. There is a lot of repetition and an emphasis on the child helping himself. Material is made available in the form of a workbook or a computer. Each step in the teaching process depends upon an understanding of previous steps, and as the child works, he is told immediately if his answer is right or wrong. Learning is thus reinforced and the child can pace himself, understanding and correcting his own errors.

Most programmed material at the beginning levels concerns itself with word recognition skills and reading of sentences, but little attention has been paid to the interpretive and critical aspects of reading. Often there is much preliminary work on letters, names and sounds to be done with the children before they can begin work in programmed materials. Although teachers are freed to some extent to work more closely with small groups and individuals, programmed instruction at present deals with only a few of the skills needed to learn to read.

Words in Color is basically an approach to reading using the relationships between sounds and symbols. It relies heavily on phonics (sounding out of letters). Forty-seven different colors on 21 drill charts represent the different sounds of English. Each sound is presented separately and is then blended with other known sounds to make words. For this method to work, the child must be able to distinguish colors as well as to hear sound differences. Pupils have a workbook containing letters in black and white, beginning with the vowel sounds and moving on to the consonants. Each page contains a separate letter, for example, "a", printed in various sizes and combinations. The pupil must sound out each letter "a" printed on the page. The teacher helps by using colored chalk. After pupils learn most of the basic sounds, a story reader is introduced to help promote fluency and comprehension.

This method places the responsibility for learning and developing an understanding of language on the child. He is helped to develop an understanding about the sounds of language and an attitude of self-criticism toward his work and that of his classmates.

Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.) was designed to make learning of letter sounds easier during the beginning stages of learning to read. The alphabet has 44 characters: 24 are from the traditional English alphabet (only x and q are missing); 14 are combinations of known letters

(symbols); and the remaining ones are invented symbols used to represent different sounds of the same letter. The same symbols in larger type are used for capitals.

Teachers using i.t.a. have basal readers as well as numerous supplementary books, and different teachers use it in different ways, so it cannot really be classed as a method of teaching reading. Pupils learning to read i.t.a. are first given intensive teaching with the alphabet in order to become skillful in understanding relationships between sounds and symbols. Simple stories help develop fluency in pronouncing words. As their ability increases, pupils are exposed to a wide variety of story material to help develop their comprehension and increase their vocabulary. They are encouraged to read a lot and to write down their experiences. Gradual transition to spelling with the regular alphabet usually takes place at the end of first or the beginning of second grade, and does not seem to be a problem since 24 of the i.t.a. characters are the same as the letters of the standard alphabet.

First graders who use i.t.a. often make rapid progress in learning to read, but much of this advantage tends to disappear after transition is made. The greatest advantage of the alphabet seems to be that it develops independence in writing at an early stage, as well as an ability to spell regular words correctly.

The methods and tools described above vary in the extent to which they lean toward either a phonetic or a linguistic approach, with many variations in the mix. Phonetic approaches which have been in use for many years are based on the idea that it is necessary to teach decoding skills through letter-sound relationships as a first step in learning to read. Those who favor these approaches believe that English can easily be sounded out letter-by-letter and that once a child has learned to decode he has learned to "read." Different phonetic programs have developed different skill sequences. Some teach vowels before teaching consonants, others begin by teaching consonant sounds. Some use a family approach (ake, make, cake, lake), others a helper approach (ba, bad, bath, bat).

Phonetic methods demand that children sound out letters to memorize sounds and be able to associate them with a symbol. Once they have learned aah, buh, cuh, duh, etc., they are then required to blend these isolated sounds to form words (cuh, aah, buh - cab). If the child recognizes the word "cab", then it is assumed he knows what a "cab" is. Although phonics is a necessary part of learning to read, teachers who rely entirely on a phonetic approach to teaching reading overlook the fact that phonics alone is not reading. Many youngsters taught to read phonetically are not always the most effective readers.

Linguistic approaches use the scientific knowledge of our language and apply it to the decoding aspect of reading. While linguistic methods vary, all begin with a study of the alphabet and the speech sounds. Regular sound-symbol relationships are presented early, giving the child mastery over a large number of words. Basic words following an irregular pattern are taught as sight words (or, the). Attention is also given to sentence patterns, voice intonation, and stress (the accenting of the more important words within a sentence). Several linguistic reading series are available. Some which follow a routine pattern, with decoding being the prime objective, are rather dull for both teacher and children. Others have turned to more realistic material and stress comprehension to a greater degree.

To summarize, no one method has been shown to be the best way to teach reading. Often different methods may be combined to provide a total reading program. Whatever method or combination of methods is used, the most important factor is a well-trained teacher, thoroughly versed in reading methodology, materials, skills, and knowledge of children's growth and needs, who will be flexible and use a combination of approaches to meet the individual differences within her class and will be able to stimulate the desire and motivation to read.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

8. ADULTS AS READING MODELS FOR CHILDREN

By Virginia H. Mathews

All behavior is learned, and much of it is learned by imitation. Reading behavior in children is no exception. Attitudes toward reading and the way of life that reading creates are learned by children from both the conscious and the unconscious actions and feelings of the adults who surround them from their earliest years. This, of course, means especially, but not exclusively their parents.

An adult model who has a feeling for the child as a person and who loves reading almost always is a necessary catalyst in bringing a particular child and books together in a lasting relationship. When a parent can begin early to fill this role of interested adult catalyst with the world of books and reading, it bodes well for all other aspects of the parent-child relationship. This adult, however, need not always be a parent. Very often in the personal history of readers, the adult has been an aunt, a grandmother or other relative. Perhaps even more often, it is a teacher, a librarian or other interested adult friend who can perhaps more objectively assess the child's personality, maturity, tastes, temperament and intellect.

There are some actions that adults deliberately encourage young children to copy: "Look, hold it the way I do," or, "Say Dad-dy." At the same time other unconscious actions are being noticed and emulated as well. Occasionally it may seem to embarrass adults in the family that their less attractive mannerisms or expressions are among the first to be "picked up." In fact, desirable behavior and language patterns are also being imitated, and, more subtly, their inflections, attitudes and habits of mind. Parents who would like their children to develop as readers must be aware that both conscious efforts in this direction and their unthinking, casual behavior will help decide whether or not they succeed.

Children arrive in a family to join a life style that has already been established before they got there. When the newcomer is surrounded by a reading-related life style, created by parents who read, who care about ideas, he will grow into it. The chances are good that he himself will become a reader.

What is a reading atmosphere? What might a reading-related life style be? The home of a reader, or a pair of readers, has books everywhere. There are magazines of all kinds and newspapers come and go regularly. There are quiet places to go to where one can be comfortable and relaxed, sometimes even alone. There is equipment for writing, paper and pencils, and there is evidence that they are used for messages, or to jot down thoughts and ideas gained from books.

There is the hum of many interests, pursued alone or in a group, in the homes of readers. Just sitting and thinking is all right too. Curiosity is rampant; experimentation is encouraged. Concerns and interests extend far beyond the immediate, the actual, the concrete. There is a tendency to look at both sides of the coin, to balance one opinion with another, to link one idea or experience with another. There is apt to be a sense of wonder and excitement about everything from moonshots to new leaves on the house plant.

Specifically, of course, readers are often to be found reading! They read about their work, they read about their hobbies, they read just for fun; and their children watch them do it. They go to the library, they buy paperbacks in bus stations to read while on a trip, they clip items from the paper to refer to later or to send to friends. They read aloud, and share with others something that strikes them as significant or funny. They talk about what they have read, and this habit makes their conversation more interesting than other people's. Their reading lends perspective and understanding to people and situations they encounter in daily life. Be they bartenders or members of the Bar, they bring knowledge gained from reading and a sense of themselves as readers into their work, and this "spinoff" makes their lives more colorful, more creative and more satisfying.

Often it is through his mother that a child first becomes aware of reading as a way of life and what it's like to be a reader. Her delight in making up stories, sometimes drawn here and there from books she read when she was a little girl, is a clue. Her habit of saying funny things

that exactly fit the occasion becomes another indicator when he learns that she is quoting from something she read. Her pleasure when he responds to words, when he starts to say them himself, and finally reads them for himself, is the clincher: reading is important, and he will be a reader like the other people in his family.

But what of the child who sees no reading models in his home? Suppose he has parents who, for one reason or another, can't read, or who don't want to read? Suppose books are neither valued nor available in his home?

An atmosphere of reading excitement and interest can fill a classroom, a Cub Scout den, or a community center, if there is a reader there to serve as an adult model. For the child who missed out on an early reading start, it is never too late. Recent writing, by young black men like Malcolm X, whose homes could not give them a reading start, gives powerful testimony that an adult reading model and a reading atmosphere can come later than early childhood and still make reading a powerful force in one's life. Claude Brown in *Manchild In The Promised Land*, tells of meeting his adult reading model, a middle-aged foreign woman, a refugee whose background could hardly have been more different from his life or with the law. She believed in his intellect, talked books with him, encouraged him to become a reader and, later, a writer. The message is a clear one for any adult reader: find an opportunity to become a reading influence, a reading model, and perhaps change a life!

All adults can become reading models in some degree, and not necessarily through a one-to-one relationship. This applies to adults who have a continuing responsibility for a particular child and who are with him regularly and often, and it applies also to those occasional adults who may have an important influence out of all proportion to the amount of time actually spent with the child or to the extent of their ongoing role in his life. A brief exposure to an impressive adult can trigger insight and set in motion developments for a lifetime. Many a small girl, seeing a dancer on TV or in person, has resolved to become a dancer. A fascinating family friend who comes across as a reader, an admired baseball star who likes reading, a friendly babysitter who reads can have the same influence.

Every adult who cares about reading and the development of readers can try to insure that his community, by the way it sets its priorities, spends its money, provides for reading instruction in its schools and support for its libraries, becomes a reading model for all its children and young people. In addition, he can create opportunities to touch young lives directly, both in his family and through community service activities such as scouting or specific reading tutoring programs. The development of good reading habits is a community responsibility shared by all good citizens.

Miss Mathews is director of the National Book Committee and the National Library Week program.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

9. VISION, HEARING, COORDINATION AND HEALTH IN READING

By Marie Skodak Crissey, Ph.D.

So he's going to school this fall! How do you get him ready? What does he need in order to be successful and happy in this big new venture? The new clothes, gleaming lunch box, unscuffed shoes are important to him to bolster his confidence in himself. But it is Dick as a person, Sally as an individual, who are bringing themselves, with their skills and assets, their handicaps and limitations, to the school door. There, with five or six years of accumulated experience, they begin the formal, organized part of their education. They have already had a lifetime, their lifetime, of learning. They do not start from scratch, and they have already learned many things so completely that formal schooling will be able to make little change in much of what they believe and how they behave.

Still, the beginning of formal schooling is a good time to take a look at some important foundations for learning. It is because reading is so important in all further education, and because it presents special problems to many children, that so much is said and written on the subject.

Take a look at our incoming 5- or 6-year-olds. First of all, you will notice a big difference in physical size. The tallest boy is likely to be nearly twice the height (and easily twice the weight) of the littlest one. The tallest girl may well be taller than the tallest boy. Does this difference in size make a difference in learning ability? Not at all. Size has little to do with intelligence or learning to read. Size, however, can have an effect on school adjustment, and the child's ability to deal with the other demands of school.

Take another look at the children, especially the ones who are noticeable because they are smaller. Does the 5-6 year-old still have the round contours, the baby-fat face and body usually seen in younger children? Is his walk a bit unsteady, is his speech still full of incomplete sentences and poorly articulated sounds and words? Does the teacher or the school nurse raise the question of "immaturity"? Could this perhaps be your child? Don't bristle if it is. This happens to be a quirk of nature about which you can do very little. Some children are simply geared to a slower pace of development. They will reach maturity, learn to read, and become successful human beings eventually.

This will come at their own pace, however, and nothing is gained by pushing the child into the race against stronger, more mature children, when he is bound to fail. The experience of having failed, and of seeing himself as a failure, can leave a long-lasting scar. If you, as a parent, have a child who seems young for his age, confer with the teacher, nurse, school social worker, psychologist or the school principal. If your school can offer an adjusted program or has an upgraded plan, or some other provision for the child who needs a special program, he can find a happy and successful spot in that school. If, on the other hand, your school can offer only a set program, and all children are expected to reach certain goals pretty much at the same time, give careful thought to delaying his school entrance for a year. Another 12 months can bring the child gratifying maturity and growth, especially if he can attend nursery school or get other experiences under your guidance. A little delay in school entrance can prevent later failure for many children. The time saved is far less important than the fact that he can then sail through the school grades without the fear of failure.

Generally speaking, the little girls will look, and be, more settled, more mature, more fluent talkers, and more ready to conform to the expectations of school. Fewer girls than boys will develop reading problems (arithmetic is a different story) and fewer will have behavior problems that bother the teacher. The boys will generally be more active, aggressive, physically stronger, noisier, less interested in the desk work and small muscle activities such as writing. These are differences you have surely seen in children as they played around the house, with, of course, individual exceptions. It takes little imagination to see how this affects classroom behavior. It is harder for boys to be quiet, to stay at their desks, to pay attention to reading and so on. They need every help and advantage they can be given, so

that they are successful from the very beginning of their school experience.

Since all learning comes to us in the beginning through the senses, it is necessary to review the child's sensory equipment as it relates to school and reading. While taste and smell are very important for kittens and puppies when they are learning their way around the world, these two senses are not especially utilized in schools. Sight and hearing do, however, need special attention.

The rare child who is totally deaf is generally recognized before he goes to school. Most children with hearing problems, however, are not totally deaf. They can manage, sometimes remarkably well, as long as they are in a familiar, predictable family or small neighborhood group. They learn not necessarily to read lips but to guess from facial expression and gesture what is said; as to the rest they seem "absentminded", "inattentive", "lazy" even "stubborn".

When such a child gets to school, all the familiar cues are gone. He can't hear the teacher to know when to look at her and watch for the signals. The general hubbub of the classroom blurs everything. He misses the instructions. He doesn't know what to do. He sees others get out their books and do something that makes no sense to him. He sees them laugh at the story the teacher is reading but her face is turned away and he can't understand what's so funny. Little wonder that he tries to fake what he thinks is expected, laughs at the wrong time, violates the "quiet time", breaks the "rules of our room" which were carefully explained a moment earlier, all because for him, the sounds did not get through, or were so indistinct or distorted that they had no meaning. Undetected hearing loss has resulted in children being labeled retarded. Indeed, educationally they usually fall increasingly behind their peers, but not because they are mentally incapable. What is often also unrecognized is that the child with a hearing loss, who is trying to keep up with the speaking world, is apt to be physically exhausted from the sheer effort of watching and straining to hear. His resulting behavior may be resigned apathy and surrender to failure, or a frantic, emotional explosion from sheer frustration.

A child who has a hearing loss cannot make his own diagnosis. He does not know what sounds should be like. Sometimes the first recognized warning comes when a child cannot associate the sounds with the printed page. He sees the letters clearly enough, but cannot hear the sounds which mean "k", "m" or other consonants. When, as sometimes happens, there is fluctuation in his hearing, he is really confused. He wonders if it can be that letters have different sounds on different days. For him reading then becomes a hopeless task.

As a parent, it is not easy to detect hearing loss, especially if the loss is moderate, or slight. Even a routine physical examination does not necessarily reveal it. Suspect a loss, however, if your child is noticeably slow to come when called, seems to be more than normally indifferent to you when his back is turned while you talk to him, if he turns the TV or record player louder than the rest of the family, if he doesn't respond when children outside call to him, if he prefers very loud and noisy toys, and so on. Don't wait until he is in serious trouble with his school work. Take his teacher into your confidence, ask her to observe, and if she, too, is concerned, arrange for a special examination. These are sometimes offered by the school, by a health department, hearing specialist, hearing clinics, hospitals and similar facilities. Depending on the findings, corrections can often be made medically. Hearing aids can open a new world when they are appropriate. Most important, the amount of hearing he has often can be developed and conserved by appropriate education and management.

For reading, an even more important sensory channel is vision. Consider the world around you: the many signs that warn of danger ("Road closed" "No exit") that tell you what to do ("Stop" "Keep right") that explain what is happening ("Construction" "Elevator coming") that give instructions ("Insert plug here"). It is not difficult to understand how much a totally blind person misses. Between total blindness, which is easily recognized, and normal vision, there are degrees of disability. Sometimes children with severe handicaps reach school age before they are recognized as needing help. It is not unusual for children with less severe vision defects to get by at home without detection. Mild defects which may seriously affect school progress are seldom caught before school entrance, yet it is these conditions which are most likely to respond to medical or visual training help.

A good vision examination before a child begins school is an obvious recommendation. It is not so easy to get one. A typical adult eye examination depends a great deal on recognizing and reading letters, on comparing sizes and shades of "blackness", on comparing "better" or

"worse". Most 5- and 6-year-olds do not know the alphabet, and cannot reliably make comparisons between small abstractions such as lines or dots. Even when they can unerringly choose the piece of cake which is just a crumb larger, the concept of similarities and differences is still one to three years away for most 5- and 6-year-olds. There are ways to evaluate a child's vision, but not every eye specialist (ophthalmologist, optometrist, optician) is either equipped to do it, or interested in doing the kind of study which would be useful to the school. Many examiners are cautious about diagnosis, too, because at this age the structure of the eye is still immature and changing. Don't be surprised if you are asked to return in a year or so, even when told your child has "essentially normal" vision now. The findings next year may not be the same. There is an understandable reluctance to recommend glasses for young children, and the art of corrective visual training is still in the early stages. You may find someone who can make many useful suggestions for vision improving activities. Watch for signs of eyestrain, such as headaches, reluctance to do visually strenuous things such as reading, or certain games, including those demanding close vision and fine discrimination and those with sudden appearance of balls or playing opponents. Discuss these observations with the school nurse and your doctor for their suggestions.

For the normal child, there is still a need for experience in looking, seeing, understanding and acting on what is seen. Most children up to age 5 through 7 tend to see middle-distance objects with greater clarity than small, close ones. Since school work focuses on near-vision, the change may require practice for most children. Beginning at least the year before school entrance, that is at about 3 and 4 years, the child should have increasing experience with pictures: large, simple outlines, uncomplicated ones at first (even as early as 1½ and 2 years), then with more details added, greater complexity in the story told, and reduction in size. The child should be encouraged not only to name the details, having looked for them with some care, but to discuss the relationships of the objects in the picture to each other ("The doggie belongs to Red Riding Hood. He is walking beside her in the dark woods."). Then the child should be encouraged to make inferences from what he sees in the picture ("I think they are afraid. They are walking fast."). Gradually, predictions which can be verified from the story should be encouraged ("They are going to be late and it will get dark before they reach Grandma's."). This kind of picture-reading requires some undisturbed time spent by the adult with a child. It should not be long—10 - 15 minutes several times a week is about right. Many children can stay with it longer, and often can continue on their own. An adult should check often though, to insure that the inferences are based on what is really in the picture, and to make sure that it is vision activity rather than purely fantasy.

The relationship of reading and vision may seem fairly obvious, but in reality it is far from being completely clear-cut. Many children with poor vision, or flaws such as astigmatism and nearsightedness, learn to read without serious problems. Other children with seemingly normal vision have trouble learning to read at all. There is an important difference between being able to *see* with clarity, and to *understand* what is seen. This interpretation of what is seen is not merely a function of the eye, but is apparently a function of the brain. Exactly how this occurs neurologically is still a matter of debate, and the issue is important for parents mainly because there has been a good deal of discussion in recent years about it. "Brain damage", "neurological dysfunction", "congenital dyslexia", and dozens of similar terms are used in discussing reading problems which seem to be based on a child's inability to relate to what he sees, to a set of meanings which can be organized into related ideas—in other words to read a word or sentence.

It is important for a child to be able to put together what he sees (vision) and what he understands (perception), but he must also be able to act on information (motor coordination). Here is where the sense of touch and of the feeling of muscles in movement comes in. The close relationship between vision and touch-movement is seen in the infant who looks and reaches but cannot grasp unless he sees the object. By adulthood, he can reach for the coffee cup without looking.

This close relationship between vision, movement and reading is the basis of some teaching, especially remedial work. The child uses his hands and fingers to trace the letters and words while he looks at them. He gets practice in comparing and discriminating sizes, shapes, designs while he traces or copies them. He may use his whole body in learning balance, distance, control. For many children, these activities were a natural part of their growing up to school age. Eye-hand coordination, visual discrimination, perceptual sensitivity all come out of play activities. Tracing designs,

playing tether ball, working "follow the numbers" puzzles, are just a few of the kinds of activities in which eyes and vision and touch and movement are combined to develop accuracy and discrimination. It is apparent that sensory and motor development cannot be separated from learning and the storing up of knowledge. The child who is encouraged to be curious, to touch, to try, to explore will have an immense advantage over the child whose horizons are limited for any reason.

We come to the fundamental condition essential for good learning. A child in good health can cope with problems and compensate for minor limitations. For the normal child, without major medical problems, in a community where there are safeguards against disease, accidents and catastrophes, the major remaining problem is one of nutrition. It is difficult for some to accept that children from homes at any level can be malnourished, but physicians often find such children and even a small degree of malnutrition can seriously affect a child's ability to learn. It can impair his motivation to study and can affect his whole attitude about himself and the world around him.

A child's eating pattern is a matter of habit. He likes what he is used to, and he is used to what his family provides. Many studies have shown that diets low in protein resulted in both poor physical development and in poor learning ability. Substituting other foods, generally carbohydrates (sugars, starches), did not meet the fundamental needs of the body either in physical growth or mental development, even when the total calories were high. While the children on a high carbohydrate diet often seem fat and well-fed, they lacked endurance and initiative. Some direct applications to school readiness can be briefly summarized: A child who is even moderately hungry is unable to pay attention, to control his behavior consistently or to be interested in intellectual challenges. Therefore, he must be provided with a nutritious and "staying" breakfast and midday meal. This must include substantial proteins as well as the supplementary fats and carbohydrates. Meals with meat or meat substitutes (eggs, fish, cheese, nuts, poultry, etc.), dairy products (milk, butter, cream, etc.) fruit and vegetables will usually supply the vitamins, trace minerals and other essentials in the course of an ordinary day. Meals based on soft drinks, cookies, potato chips are not balanced meals, and the child who lives on them will inevitably be short of the energy, endurance and vitality he must have for successful school work. Sending the child off to school with a protein-rich breakfast is one of the best ways a parent can help his youngster become a good student. The juice and cracker mid-morning snack served in many schools is intended only as a quick energy supplement. It cannot replace a meal. Suggestions for meals with low-cost protein foods and menu planning can be secured from the school nurse, the county agricultural extension services and many other sources.

The well-nourished child, who enjoys balanced, nutritious meals, who gets enough rest and has a reasonably happy home life, whose vision, hearing and motor skills are normal or corrected, is prepared for school. At this point, the teacher joins the parents in the task of preparing the young learner for the adventure and challenge of his education.

Dr. Crissey is a consulting psychologist.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

10. REDUCING PRESSURES IN LEARNING TO READ

By Dr. Grayce A. Ransom

Changes, whether welcome or unwelcome, produce pressure. To a child, starting school means changes. How can parents try to reduce the variety of possible pressures? First of all, parents can be aware of, and try to overcome their own anxieties about their child's beginning school experience. The child's fears about his new situation can then be more easily handled. School-like experiences beforehand can help: Sunday School, nursery school, visits with children who are not everyday playmates. Visits to a nursery school or kindergarten can be the basis for "pretend we're in school" play.

Parents are inclined to worry about reading especially. How soon will their child learn to read? Think about all the babies you have known. At what age did they first walk? First talk? There were probably many differences among them, and so it is with reading. Learning to read depends upon the physical, mental, emotional and neurological equipment of the particular child. Each child has his own success pattern, different from those of his classmates and even from his own brothers and sisters. There is ample evidence that a number of approaches are effective in helping children learn to read. The greatest need is finding the right approaches for the individual child. Careful diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses he brings to beginning reading are important.

Such tensions and pressures are among the more obvious ones. There are a number of hidden pressures, too, which are harder to detect in oneself or in one's child.

Pressure from Anxiety about Failure

Your child will observe in kindergarten or first grade that some children can do reading tasks better than others. He knows with overwhelming certainty that people expect him to read. Teachers, parents and other adults should be sure that children understand that the inability to do some tasks is not a disgrace. It simply points the way for further instruction and more practice.

Psychologists point out that appreciation shown to the child for any tasks he does well will give him courage to tackle confidently tasks which are hard for him. Constant criticism of his weaknesses will gradually lessen his will to try anything new or difficult. Every child has some abilities that are worthy of praise. If he is helped to accept himself, even a slower timetable of learning will not upset him, especially if he knows that his parents too accept his learning style.

Pressure from Anxiety about the Reading Program

It is helpful for parents to understand something of the foundations for learning to read and not to convey to the child their impatience with preliminaries. Reading is part of a network of communications processes based on the child's listening and speaking experiences. The child must distinguish and remember sounds, letter and word forms. He must be able to understand meanings of sentences and paragraphs and to react to them. Most of all, he needs to feel that he gains something from reading right now, not only in the future.

Many of the pre-reading activities which parents may see in schools are more important to reading readiness than they may seem. Games, storytelling, and puppets, listening to stories and recordings of stories, conversations about experiences all lead the way to book reading.

Pressure from Unrealistic Goals

Happiness is most often the result of achieving through your own efforts something that you value. Drive and self-determination are required in reaching such a goal. Parents sometimes organize their children's lives around skills and activities they think their children should have for growth, such as dancing lessons, Little League, Girl Scouts, or whatever. All of these are good activities, but not every child needs every one of them. This applies to school activities too. A child's achievement in some areas will be better than in others. Each child has a "set" or natural inclination which leads him to faster achievement

in some areas than others. Knowing this will help parents to relieve pressure that comes from over-expectation.

However, if parents feel that a child's interests and capacities, realistically appraised, are not being well enough challenged by the school, conferences will help to develop joint home-school plans which complement each other. Most teachers are delighted to talk to parents who show a desire to work cooperatively with the child.

Pressures Arising from a Child's Inability to Understand Concepts in Words and Sentences

Many children have not had a chance to have a variety of experiences with animals, nature, factories, different groups of people, libraries. A wise parent will not only help his child be part of such experiences but will also talk about them. Children's questions, answered in ways which help point to more learning, are springboards to open learning. Discussions about what was seen help stir ideas in sentence form. This is fundamental to a child understanding "book talk".

Helping a child find answers to his questions in books is another rewarding experience. Using such plans can add valuable dimensions to TV viewing.

Finding new words for describing things, people, events can become a great game enjoyed by adults *and* children and sparked by a variety of experiences provided by the home and other influences in the child's life.

Pressure from Unrecognized, Unspoken Feelings

All of the pressures previously discussed might lead to intense feelings on the part of both parents and child. Children, especially, have very little capacity to verbalize their concerns. Behavior is the feeling-language of children. Many adults similarly have difficulty in pin-pointing and expressing their feelings. Negative feelings may be especially hard to express. Children are often secretly afraid to voice and share negative feelings. They must be helped to that freedom by parents who understand its function.

Pressure from Unfair Comparisons

Most parents realize that comparisons between brothers and sisters in the family are not helpful. However, it seems almost second nature to make comparisons particularly if an older child has learned to read well.

Neighborhood conversation can also be a trap. With the present intense interest and concern about reading, it sometimes requires a very strong will to put worries aside if one's child is struggling with reading while the next-door neighbor's child is progressing rapidly in reading skills.

Most reading problems can be handled successfully at early primary levels if they are recognized and treated by use of simpler materials and varied experience while protecting the child from feeling guilty about use of such materials.

The parents can find out from the teacher about skill strengthening activities which are game-like in nature, and which are good for developing perception, following directions, problem-solving and other skills.

In addition, an activity which absolutely avoids comparisons with other children but focuses on books, is the parent reading aloud to the family. Listening to stories is a tremendous force for welding groups together. Your local librarian will gladly help find such books, some of which might gently include characters whose problems resemble some in the particular family. Listening to the printed word will strengthen the child's desire to read independently, if supported by skill-building activities appropriate for him.

Pressure from Guilt Feelings about Reading

Many adults who are unhappy about their own reading habits or skills often put extra pressure on their children, hoping to help them avoid the pitfalls of their own experience. Such attempts almost always fail. One of the things known about children who show good reading achievement is that often in the child's background, someone close to him enjoyed reading a great deal and served as a model for him. Even if a parent has not enjoyed reading, he can try to do at least a minimum of reading at a time when children can see that he is doing it. If the parent is a poor reader he might enroll in a reading course at adult school.

Pressure from Allowing Children to Remain Emotionally Immature

In another category are those children whose drive is sabotaged by lack of independence. Some parents tend to do too much thinking and planning for their children. Growth in reading, dependent on effort and attention, is closely tied to the ability to take responsibility in other ways.

Little tasks should be assigned and praised when completed. Natural results of doing or not completing such tasks should be allowed to take effect by parents, and the tasks should be realistic ones, so that obvious success is possible. In keeping with the child's need for variety, the tasks should be changed frequently enough to keep them interesting.

Pressures about School Reporting

Many parents and schools have been working together to avoid pressures that result from types of school reporting.

High or low marks tell us very little about the reading needs of children. Parents might work increasingly with schools to ask that they report more thoroughly on a child's progress. And conferences with the child's teacher or guidance counselor, even if possible only by phone, are a must for learning how to help your child.

It is natural for parents to be concerned about their child's reading progress. By learning more about what you can do to help your young learner, by cooperating with his school, you can make your concern work to benefit both of you.

Dr. Ransom is director of The Reading Center at the University of Southern California.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

11. GETTING HELP ON READING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

By Virginia H. Mathews

Where parents should turn for reading help for their children, outside of the school, depends a great deal on what kind of help they need and why they feel they need it. Consultation with the child's school, his teacher, the principal or the reading specialist is a first step in clarifying objectives and getting sound advice.

Is this help to prepare for, supplement or replace what the school is already trying to do? Is the child getting ready to read, or is he already having trouble with his reading? In other words, is the need for developmental help in laying groundwork and trying to insure future success in reading, or is it to try to overcome the effects of failure or a bad start?

In addition to asking themselves these questions, parents should carefully examine their reading expectations from their child, themselves and the school. Are they realistic, based on some degree of understanding about learning to read and the varying rates at which children learn? Do they take into account the fact that there is a shared responsibility for reader development?

It is important to recognize that learning to read is a process which includes several elements. It is accomplished in stages, over a period of time, and in several places including the home, the nursery school or other preschool, the community library, and the school. It starts before a child ever gets to school, as he develops a sense of identity, interests, concepts, and some familiarity with spoken language and its meaning. It continues after he gets to school and begins formal instruction in reading, accompanied by the continuing development of his motivations and interests, and supported by encouragement and reinforcement from his family and friends. It includes a variety of stimulating activities such as TV programs, puppet shows, being read aloud to, trips, hobbies, and lots of books around him at home and in his classroom for him to want to read.

Obviously, there are many aspects of this process for which the school cannot and should not be solely responsible. The primary, but not the *total* responsibility for helping children learn to read, rests with the school. The home, TV channels, day care centers, camp counselors, librarians, den mothers, Little League coaches and eye doctors–all must be expected to do their share.

Let's talk first about the kind of help available to parents who want to be sure that their preschool child is prepared for reading, or that their school beginner is getting all the support and reinforcement he needs.

First, there is the matter of physical ability and comfort in reading. The school will do its best when the child enters to spot any eye or ear problems that could create reading problems for him. But parents who make it a point to notice beforehand if there seems to be trouble and check it at a clinic or with their own doctor before school starts can eliminate frustration and a bad start on reading due to physical causes.

Some television programs can be put to very effective use as reading development helpers. Children's TV Workshop programs (The Electric Company and Sesame Street), Captain Kangaroo, Romper Room and a number of other programs for young children can give a good deal of experience in words, names, sounds, numbers, reasoning and other prereading skills to the children who simply sit and watch them. To make the programs even more effective, parents and others who work with small children can build on and extend the concepts introduced by practicing them with their child after the program is over, using them to help pave the way for reading and the desire to read.

Another effective and ready helper is the children's librarian and her staff who work out of the public library. Story hours and picture book reading sessions, an increasing number of them held in Spanish in the many areas of the country where there are Spanish-speaking children, are a great adjunct to prereading and beginning reading instructional programs. Children learn to listen, to respond, to ponder meanings, to relate sounds and letters and to examine pictures for their relationship with words. Best of all, they learn what imagining can be and how reading feeds

their own ability to do it. They long to be able to read all the books for themselves!

Many childrens' librarians are skilled at fingerplays and other games that develop word reasoning and problem-solving skills; they have at hand films and recordings that stimulate interests and lead to reading. They produce puppet shows in which stories are acted out and children have a chance to identify with characters about whom they can later read.

Not only do childrens' librarians take many of these wonderful word and picture programs out of the library to day care centers, parks, and neighborhood centers, but they take books with them to leave with children and their parents. Many libraries are now sponsoring TV watching sessions where Sesame Street and other programs are followed up with related stories, concept practice and reading.

Beginning readers meet potential reading developers everywhere. Coaches and counselors, religious school teachers and others can all be enlisted to give necessary boosts to reading motivation or even, on occasion, reading practice.

What of the child, though, who has tried and failed, who has run the gamut of whatever special programs and specialists the school has tried with him? Again, after consultation with the school to check on their view of the problem, and making sure that there really is a problem that could be solved by seeking outside help, the first step might be an outside-of-the-school diagnostic reading center. Many of these are related to university schools of education; others are private commercial enterprises. The reading consultant or specialist of the school district should be helpful in referring parents to the one that might best meet the need of a particular child. Again, physical causes for difficulty in learning to read should be checked out, as well as psychological barriers. This whole process of finding out what is wrong and what the most effective treatment might be is a step in which the parents should be willing to involve themselves with the professionals who are seeking the answers.

The prescription will of course depend on the diagnosis. It may be that the child is in need of large helpings of individual attention, motivation and practice in reading at his own level. Perhaps he will be referred to the services of an individual who is able to provide him with undivided attention and one-to-one help. This person may be either a professional or volunteer who will patiently work with him in a relaxed out-of-school setting in which he feels comfortable. Thousands of people throughout the country have volunteered to assist children in learning to read either under the direction and supervision of the school system or under the sponsorship of some other agency or organization.

Perhaps, on the other hand, the child's reading problems are such that they require intensive work with a highly skilled reading professional. In this case, either a university reading center or a reputable private tutor or remedial service should be sought.

In summary: the kind of help sought must depend on the kind of help really needed. Many parents may find, after all the tests and the probing, that the kind of enriched reading environment, reinforcement and interest that they can provide at home is what their child needs most.

Miss Mathews is director of the National Book Committee and the National Library Week program.

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Parents and Beginning Readers

12. WHAT CAN COMMUNITIES DO TO IMPROVE READING PROGRAMS?

By D. Philip Baker

Henry Ward Beecher once said: "I read for three things: first to know what the world has done during the past 24 hours, and is about to do today; second, for the knowledge that I especially want in my work; and third, for what will bring my mind into a proper mood." No modern philosopher could say it better. We must read to gain some understanding of what is happening in our world. We must read with ease so that we can fulfill the economic demands of a complex and technologically advanced society. Reading, too, sharpens thinking, provides for intellectual growth, and makes it possible to escape for a time from petty problems into an expanded world of ideas and insight. Today, perhaps more than ever, the essential individual privilege of knowing how to read for pleasure should belong to everyone.

The parents of a young child who is about to undergo his first experience of formalized reading instruction may feel a little uneasy about this process. For the parents, one thing should be made very clear: although reading may be thought of by many as a single activity, it is actually a complex process involving all the language skills of listening, seeing, talking and writing. To these must be added the ability to think creatively and clearly. Reading and thinking *are* linked and are, in fact, directly dependent upon each other.

Parents are probably aware of several community institutions that, in a variety of ways, relate to the beginning reader; educational institutions, pre-school through primary and up, come readily to mind. The public library also has a traditional role in fostering reading. Increasingly, though, today's community offers fewer formal agencies to back up the community reading effort. The resources to promote and develop an excellent reading program within a community are nearly always present. Not every element is present in every community in the same form, and some communities may be lacking one or more of them, but this need not prevent progress. At times resources must be sought out, discovered and carefully developed. The greatest resource of any community is not its buildings, its industries, or its monuments, but its people. With wise involvement of people, giant steps toward developing a reading program can be undertaken.

For instance, the use of volunteers who have received special training to help in community reading programs is a real possibility. In recent years schools have turned increasingly to trained volunteers; classrooms and school library programs have benefited greatly from untold hours of volunteer service. Each volunteer is a potential agent to assist in the community reading effort. They can give assistance within the schools so that reading teachers, librarians and other specialists are freed to devote intensive efforts to those with special reading problems; they can also provide knowledgeable support for reading programs located in church day care centers, preschool programs, or other related endeavors.

A source of excellent manpower to assist in the community reading programs is secondary school students. Their optimism and desire to serve meshes perfectly with the acute need for their services. Frequently, these students have performed small miracles by providing an intense personal interest in the reading efforts of one or two younger children. When the young reader is read to, when someone cares to discuss what has been read, then he will nearly always respond with an increased desire to read more. Junior high and high school students are a rich potential resource for developing volunteer-assisted reading programs.

Increasingly available, too, is a reservoir of mature citizens. Many retired people have time and talent to work actively with a variety of reading programs, and they have a wealth of experience and knowledge to bring to any project in which they participate.

Churches and service organizations can provide a vital service by coordinating the efforts of our citizens. They can help to promote an active interest in volunteer reading development efforts; often they can provide the physical facilities for whatever training programs are necessary. Most important, they can provide the necessary service

of bringing together those who need help with reading with those who can provide this help.

The job of teaching reading and nurturing the desire to read should not belong only to the reading teacher, librarian and other reading professionals. If the current level of literacy is to be raised for everyone, teachers and librarians must learn to "spin off" small bits of their own knowledge and skill by training others to take over some aspects of their job with their continuing guidance and support.

Reading materials must be constantly and readily available, if reading interests are to be stimulated. Today, a great variety of good quality paperback books is available for all age levels. Every community has a particular place where its young people congregate. In the summer it may be a beach or a lake, or perhaps a drive-in movie. In the winter, a skating rink or a movie house might be the "in place." Whatever, this could be an ideal spot to place a good quantity of attractive paperbacks, suitable for all age levels, to be borrowed or bought. Churches, service organizations, private industry, schools and libraries, each can cooperate in this venture. With a minimal investment, a large supply of paperbacks can be purchased and display racks made available. Volunteers can man the distribution of books. If necessary, someone could be paid a minimal salary to staff the operation. It should be possible to return these books to any book booth location since the books should circulate from place to place anyway.

Television can play a central role in connection with the community reading effort. Many programs have been developed that have an impact on learning to read and think. There lies ahead yet another important frontier in television, the Community Antenna Television (CATV) franchise. As soon as current national and state legislative debates settle its future in our nation, its potential for impact on reading will be enormous. Like all television stations, CATV will have to provide a specified amount of time for educational purposes. This is a regulation of the Federal Communications Commission. The people in your community might petition the local stations to make sure that a significant proportion of this television time is devoted to reading education programs. If commercial television operations must make available this educational television time, then the role of television as a developer of reading skills and abilities is limited only by our imaginations. As both a remedial and enrichment tool, the potential impact of television on reading is tremendous.

Private industry, too, is showing an increasing interest and commitment to becoming a partner in the development of reading progress. Industry and our institutions often work closely together in developing and implementing reading programs. Increasingly, industry understands that it has a huge stake in a literate society, and either sets up its own reading development programs or contracts for them with learning institutions. A literate employee is more valuable on the job than one who cannot read. In the past decade a profusion of reading materials and equipment to go with them have been developed. Most of these materials have been geared to the reader who is having difficulty, but a growing number are for enriching and stimulating the interest of good readers.

It is important for the parent of the beginning reader to beware of the gimmicks involved in many schemes and private commercial programs that promise to teach reading, or vastly improve reading skills. No amount of electronic equipment or programmed playthings alone can force a child to learn to read, or read better. The child must be supported by excellent teaching, concerned parents, and a healthy feeling of self-confidence. Given these elements the child will, in most cases, respond with enthusiasm to reading.

The school and the public library, the traditional institutions the community has assigned the teaching and development of reading, must be better supported in their efforts to play their roles and helped to become more responsive to a community's concern for reading. Our schools and libraries must become centers where the resources that stimulate and sustain reading, all the data, media, packaged programs and people are readily accessible. Such an approach *must* involve the community, for many people can contribute to the development of this kind of environment. Concerned parents, in the best tradition of American community action, must be certain that their schools and public libraries serve as stimulators to the desire to read. Essentially, reading, once learned, becomes a matter of making time to read. The child who has learned to enjoy reading will find the time. The child who has been taught in such a way as to make reading a despised exercise will make every excuse not to read. Humane, joyous classrooms and libraries manned by people who care about reading can make the difference.

In this brief look at what institutions in the community can do about reading, it seems clear that the promise of community involvement to improve reading remains largely that—a promise. Private industry, concerned parents, enlightened citizens, progressive schools, have a complementary stake in ensuring excellent community-wide reading programs. However, the talents, ambitions and concerns of each must be pulled together to promote and support a truly comprehensive national reading effort.

To fully develop this potential, communities must take stock and evaluate what they are doing now for reading. It may be that the impetus for this evaluation will come from a traditional group such as the PTA or the League of Women Voters or from a specially formed Reading Resources Council in which many groups are involved. Perhaps a less formal approach may be developed by the actions of concerned citizens who belong to these groups. In any case an inventory and evaluation of what is available and what is being accomplished is a necessary place to start.

This evaluation would include such things as: What methods of reading instruction are being used in the programs available within the public schools? What do these programs do for the individual children? Does the public library promote programs that take reading to young people, and not just wait for the young people to come to them? What are our pre-school and day care programs doing to help promote the love of reading and readiness to learn reading skills? Does industry have programs that are available to those trying to master reading after the years of formal schooling? What kinds of television and other audio-visual materials are made available within the community to help reading performance? What are the churches, synagogues and service groups accomplishing to assist in the national and local reading effort: sponsorship of tutoring programs, adult continuing education groups, paperback books for sale at meetings? These are just a few of the questions a community must ask of itself before a total reading effort can be mounted.

Once the answers to these questions have been gathered and you have found out what is being done for reading in your community, an evaluation must be made. This procedure should seek to promote harmony within the community rather than attempt to place the blame for a low level of literacy. It is too easy to blame our schools, our libraries, or somebody else for the national reading crisis. Those parents who wish to make a genuine contribution to this effort should seek not to cast blame but rather to inform themselves and then, acting as good citizens, support the systematic long-term improvement needed. This is not to say that good citizenship in support of the reading effort means accepting all that is being done as "good." Our schools, libraries, and other institutions need to be judged in a critical and objective manner. We must not accept empty promises and vague statements of purpose. We must demand that all those who have a role in the teaching of reading truly perform as they should and this means that public expectation of literacy levels must be high.

The word community implies a common interest, common goals and aspirations. Reading is a common concern; it helps to equip people to live together, to think and to communicate. As the changing environment and technological innovation demand more of all of us, the need for reading grows, and only through community action at the local level can reading opportunity be made wide open, available to all.

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